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ABSTRACT

During the winter of 1988-89, a study was undertaken of state-aidable noncredit course offerings at the State University of New York (SUNY) community colleges. This type of offering, produced by allowing certain noncredit enrollments to generate aidable full-time equivalent students, has provided a wide variety of educational opportunities and has been credited by some as keeping "community" in the college. In New York, these courses include remedial instruction, vocational preparation and community service classes. The purpose of the study was to gather information on these courses and to assess their outcomes and effectiveness as perceived by enrolled students. Data were collected from two questionnaires: one distributed to noncredit course enrollees at the 30 SUNY community colleges, and the other to local directors and coordinators of these courses. Returns were received from administrators at 27 SUNY community colleges (a college response rate of 90%); and a total of 3,411 usable responses were received from students enrolled in spring 1989, from which a representative sample of 1,663 responses was drawn. Major findings included the following: (1) the total cost to the state for the state-aidable courses in 1988-89 was $9,512,880; (2) of the over 2,000 courses reported for the spring 1989 semester, 71.5% were vocational, 19.5% were community service, and 9% remedial; (3) nearly three-fourths of the course enrollees were employed full-time or part-time; (4) the major reasons for enrollment included self-enrichment or self-improvement, a desire to update job skills, fulfill licensure or certification requirements, or increase academic skills; (5) 93.5% of the responding students rated their noncredit courses as "good" or "very good," with 5% rating them as "fair" and 1.5% as "poor"; (6) three out of four respondents indicated that an increase in fees by 50% would prevent them from enrolling; and (7) suggestions provided by respondents included offering more courses at more convenient times and providing something tangible, such as a certificate, to be awarded at the conclusion of a course. Appendixes include detailed student responses and the survey instruments. (JMC)

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AN ASSESSMENT OF STATE AIDABLE NONCREDIT COURSES AT SUNY COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Prepared for

Office of Community Colleges
State University of New York Central Administration

by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The intended outcome of this study was an assessment of state-aidable noncredit remedial, vocational and community service course offerings through documentation of program outcomes and effectiveness as perceived by enrollees. Data were collected from a sample of students enrolled during the 1989 spring semester (n = 3,411). A second questionnaire was completed by the director/coordinator of these programs.

Cooperation was provided from 27 of the 30 SUNY community colleges. Because of the variations in distribution and response rate at the local campuses, a stratified study sample more representative of actual statewide distribution (n = 1,663) was produced by randomly selecting responses from returns at selected colleges. A rank order correlation statistic was used to verify that the study sample was an appropriate data base from which valid judgments and observations could be made.

The survey data support a conclusion that noncredit state-aidable courses are achieving their purposes. The courses serve a broad segment of the community and the experiences meet their expectations. The quality is high, to the point that nearly all respondents are willing to recommend their experience to others. The sense of fulfillment and perceived quality is pervasive across all types of courses, ranging from specific training for a required license to broader psycho-social benefits enjoyed by older enrollees. Noncredit courses are beneficial in that they provide an affordable, easily accessible avenue for learning experiences that result in personal growth and achievement, an increase in vocational skills and occupational worth and improvement in academic skills. Current public policy and state support appears to be paying dividends to participants and to the state through growth of its human capital.

Enrollee characteristics suggest a heterogeneous student body which varies by the type of course and the focus of the instruction. Participating individuals include youth seeking to enhance interests or academic skills, young and middle age adults in their working years seeking job-related skills and personal enrichment, and mature persons in programs geared for retirees and older adults.

Five of every eight respondents in the study sample are female. Of the three categories of courses there is a significantly higher proportion of females than males in vocational courses and more vocational courses offered than remedial or community service courses. Since most courses are interest driven these data may reflect the increase of women who are in or are entering the workplace. The income level of participants is somewhat related to age but vocational courses are most popular regardless of age with the exception of senior citizen programs.

The primary motivations for participating in noncredit courses are self-improvement or enrichment and employability. A number of respondents indicate a dual motivation to enroll because they seek to upgrade/gain job skills as well as increase self-esteem or gain personal satisfaction from participation. The most frequently indicated motivation to enroll is self-improvement (which could include job

skills) except for the unemployed/seeking-job group (about 6% of the sample), which typically seek job preparation skills.

Nearly all participants assess the quality of their course as good or very good and would recommend it to others. Over 75% express high satisfaction and report that their expectations for the course are being met. About 7% report some type of enrollment or access problem, the most common being inconvenient scheduling or troublesome administrative procedure. Of those with vocational motivations, about 50% anticipate tangible benefits from the workplace such as a promotion, raise or recognition.

An increase of 50% in fees is determined as prohibitive to future enrollment by about three of every four respondents. If noncredit course opportunities were no longer available, alternatives would be considered according to purpose and accessibility. There does not appear to be any one alternative source for what they seek from noncredit course participation.

Open-ended questions draw many comments of satisfaction and descriptions of personal benefits. Some note that remedial courses serve as a bridge back into the teaching-learning situation and provide a nonthreatening segue to future noncredit and credit work. Others highlight the job skill benefits and the high quality of the courses and instruction.

Recommendations made by respondents include requests for more courses, for something tangible such as a certificate to serve as proof of participation, and for community colleges to continue to offer affordable education because results are beneficial for all of society, not just participating individuals. Senior citizens are especially grateful for these programs.

AN ASSESSMENT OF STATE AIDABLE NONCREDIT COURSES
AT SUNY COMMUNITY COLLEGES

INTRODUCTION

One of the unique characteristics of community colleges, as contrasted with other segments of higher education, has been the institutional priority to provide a wide variety of noncredit educational opportunities. Such programs have been credited by some observers as keeping "community" in the college.

Since 1977, New York State has recognized the value of this type of offering by allowing certain noncredit enrollments to generate aidable full-time equivalent students. For purposes of state aid, noncredit courses are grouped into three categories:

- Remedial instruction--instruction concerned with diagnosing, correcting or improving such basic academic skills as oral and written communications, reading, analytical concepts and general study habits and patterns, to overcome in part or in whole any particular marked deficiency which interferes with a student's ability to pursue an educational objective effectively.
- Vocational preparation--courses designed to provide education, training, or retraining in one or more semi-skilled, skilled, technical, or other occupational categories, to prepare the student for entrance into a chosen vocation, upgrading of present employment opportunity, or achievement of other career goals.
- Community service--an educational program activity or service designed to assist in the solution of community problems or aid in the development and

maintenance of desirable social conditions in a locality.[1]

Remedial programs have a relationship to the community colleges because as open enrollment institutions there is an obligation to help students overcome deficient academic skills. In contrast to firm-specific training available through contract courses and other programs, vocational noncredit courses are occupation or skill-related and classes are generally open to the public. Community service courses address community needs in a number of ways through a variety of subjects such as safety and community health. In other words, aidable noncredit continuing education courses directly contribute to educational, economic and social development in their college service areas.

During 1987-88, SUNY's 30 community colleges taught nearly 330,000 credit hours of aidable noncredit courses, producing nearly 11,000 full-time equivalent students (FTE). Aidable noncredit courses are pre-audited by SUNY Central Administration and statewide totals of remedial, vocational and community service courses are reported annually. Although individual colleges collect evaluative data on their offerings, there has been no comprehensive assessment of the impact of these courses.

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[1]Code of Standards and Procedures for the Administration and Operation of Community Colleges under the Program of the State University of New York, Section 602.5.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

During the winter of 1988-89, the Two-Year College Development Center, University at Albany, in cooperation with the Office of Community Colleges, State University of New York Central Administration, undertook a study of state-aidable noncredit course offerings at SUNY's community colleges. The goal of this research was a statewide assessment of aidable noncredit remedial, vocational and community service courses. More specifically, the study sought to document outcomes and effectiveness as perceived by consumers, the enrolled students.

The primary data collection technique was a mail survey consisting of two questionnaires, one designed for noncredit course enrollees and one for local directors/coordinators of noncredit courses. Prior to statewide distribution, the instruments were reviewed by the Office of Community Colleges and revisions made. The instrument for coordinators requested a listing of all noncredit state-aidable courses planned to be taught during the 1989 spring semester with designation of category (remedial, vocational, or community service)[2], course length, student headcount, estimated FTE, and identification of any firms or agencies that were known to have promoted enrollment of their employees. Coordinators were also asked to provide summary estimates of enrollments, headcount, and FTE, for the 1988 spring and fall/winter semesters as well as the targeted 1989 spring semester.

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[2]The designation of course category was a local determination at the time of this study.

The questionnaire designed for noncredit students sought data on demographics, motivation, benefits, assessment, and perceived impact on participation if tuition increased. The two questionnaires constitute Appendix A of this document.

The Coordinator Survey, a letter requesting cooperation, and multiple copies (in numbers estimated from 1987-88 enrollments) of the Students' Form were mailed to program coordinators with information copies to the college president at each of the 30 SUNY community colleges. The cover letter requested that the Student Forms be distributed to a 25% sample of current enrollees in state-aidable noncredit courses, and after completion and collection, the coordinator and student forms be returned to the Two-Year College Development Center by April 30, 1989.

After appropriate follow-up requests, returns were received from 27 SUNY community colleges, a college response rate of 90%. From these 27 colleges, a total of 3,411 usable responses were received from course enrollees. Based upon the estimated headcount for the spring semester, the number of returns constituted approximately 10% of the total population. However, the number of responses received from each college did not, in all cases, accurately reflect the ratio of enrollment at an individual campus to enrollment statewide. Some campuses chose to exceed the requested 25% sample of current courses while others distributed or mailed student forms to individuals who had been enrolled in noncredit courses prior to the targeted survey period.

In order to produce a study sample that would better represent the statewide enrollment distribution among campuses, a sample of 1,663 was drawn from the total responses received. The Spearman Rank-Order cor-

relation statistic was used to test the relationship between the sample and the total FTE of the population as reported by the Central Administration Office of Institutional Research, State University of New York, November 1988. Because the relationship was significant, ($p < .01$), it was concluded that the study sample would serve as an adequate data base from which valid findings and judgments could be drawn.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: COORDINATOR RESPONSES

What is the scope of noncredit programs?

The coordinators of state aidable noncredit courses at SUNY community colleges were asked for information regarding categories of individual courses, estimates of headcount and FTE, and identification, if possible, of firms or agencies having employees enrolled in specific courses. The responses provided for number of courses, student headcount and FTE estimates are summarized in Figure 1. It should be noted that these data are based on the information provided by 23 community colleges, of which two reported data from only one of their three campuses. Of the seven colleges not included, four chose not to respond and three shared data in a format that was not usable in this study. Since some of this information consisted of planned estimates, official enrollment data reported at a later date will differ.

Based on data summed in Figure 1, estimated FTE ranges from almost 1,700 in the 1988 summer semester to more than 2,300 during the 1989 spring semester, the target of this study, resulting in a total FTE of 6098.4. As indicated previously, all 30 community colleges are not

Figure 1

SUMMARY: FREQUENCY OF NONCREDIT AIDABLE COURSES, HEADCOUNT AND ESTIMATED FTE

Course Category	Summer Semester 1988			Fall/Winter Semester 1988			Spring Semester 1989		
	Number of Courses	Total Student Headcount	Total Estimated FTE	Number of Courses	Total Student Headcount	Total Estimated FTE	Number of Courses	Total Student Headcount	Estimated Total FTE
Remedial	127	4,894	153.27	165	6,760	425.59	180	6,798	415.45
Vocational	625	10,991	500.38	1,598	27,791	1,129.64	1,687	28,039	1,329.48
Community Service	637	13,813	550.77	709	16,577	386.35	758	18,199	585.11
No category specified	60	14,186	479.74	241	9,072	142.63	-	-	-
TOTAL:	1,449	43,884	1,684.16	2,713	60,200	2,084.21	2,625	53,036	2,330.04

n = 23 colleges due to missing data.

included in these data. The campuses that are not included account for 34.5% of the 1987-88 average annual FTE, or 3791.8. If this number is added to the estimates of the 23 responding campuses, the total is approximately 400 less than the official figures for 1987-88.

There may be several reasons for slightly lower totals than might be expected. Data were estimated during a period of budget discussions at the state level when aid for noncredit courses was being threatened. Coordinators may have reacted on the conservative side in anticipation of a reduction or cap on state aid. Also because of the timing of the study, estimates were given during the middle of the semester and coordinators may not have foreseen later course developments.

Estimated student headcount by the 23 colleges was reported at almost 44,000 in summer 1988, more than 60,000 in fall 1989, and more than 53,000 during the target semester, resulting in a total of 157,120 individuals participating in noncredit courses at the responding colleges. The total number of courses reported was 6,787 for the 1988-89 year. For the targeted 1989 spring semester, 2,625 courses were planned to be offered which represents 38.7% of all courses. Of the total estimated student headcount, 33.8% were estimated to be enrolled during the 1989 spring semester.

The impact of state-aidable courses on state aid can be described as follows. Using the reported estimated total FTE of 6,098, and multiplying by the state aid amount of $1,560 per FTE, the total cost to the state for these programs at only the responding colleges (23) calculates to $9,512,880. Using similar calculations for the semester under study, the cost to the state for spring 1989 would be $3,634,862.

Of all reported courses for the spring 1989 semester, 71.5% of the more than 2,000 courses were categorized as vocational, 19.5% as community service and 9% as remedial. Not all categories of courses were offered each semester at each college; during the 1989 spring semester, four colleges reported no remedial courses and two reported no community service courses.

While vocational noncredit courses provide content related to occupations, the courses are designed for the general population. However, to determine the kinds of employers that may benefit from these courses, ten of the 27 responding colleges identified 82 firms or agencies that had employees enrolled in noncredit courses. By way of illustration, the reported employers are categorized by types in order of frequency:

26.8% Wholesale and retail businesses

15.9% Manufacturing industries

15.9% Federal, state and local municipalities/agencies

10.9% Community, social agencies

8.5% Educational institutions

7.3% Construction and building trades

6.1% Sales and service

3.7% Health agencies

2.4% Agriculture

2.4% Employee organizations

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: NONCREDIT STUDENT RESPONSES

What are the characteristics of noncredit enrollees?

The typical noncredit course enrollee is a married female, aged 31-40, earning over $30,000 annually. She is employed full-time, has some college education and has not taken a course before at the respective college, either credit or noncredit. However, there is more diversity in the sample of enrollees than indicated by this statement of medians and averages of the data.

As shown in Figure 2, responding noncredit students represented a comprehensive age span. The greatest number, 26.6%, fell in the 31-40 age range followed by 24.2% in the 21-30 age range, and 21.1% aged 41-50. More than 71% of the responding students were between the ages of 21 to 50. More than 62% of the respondents were female. More than half (57%) were married, 30% single, and almost 13% separated, divorced or widowed. The annual family income of respondents ranged from less than $10,000 to more than $50,000 with a fairly even distribution between those amounts.

The highest level of education attained by the respondents ranged from some high school to the doctorate degree. The greatest number, more than 29%, reported having some college credits. Almost 25% reported the high school diploma as maximum level of education. The respondents were asked to indicate the number of courses previously taken at the respective college. More than half (54%) reported no previous noncredit courses and 62.5% no previous credit courses taken.

A large majority of respondents (75.9%) were employed on a full or part-time basis. Nearly 6% reported being unemployed but seeking a job, 6% retired and nearly 4% as not employed outside the home.

Figure 2

SUMMARY: SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF NONCREDIT STUDENT RESPONDENTS

	20 & under	21 - 30	31 - 40	41 - 50	51 - 60	Over 60
Age:	10.6%	24.2%	26.6%	21.1%	10.6%	6.9%

	Female	Male
Gender:	62.4%	37.6%

	Single	Married	Separated	Divorced	Widowed	Other
Marital Status:	30.2%	57.3%	2.1%	7.1%	2.6%	.5%

	<$10,000	$10,000-19,999	$20,000-29,999	$30,000-39,999	$40,000-49,999	$50,000 & over
Family Income Level:	8.9%	16.2%	18.5%	16.4%	15.9%	24.1%

	Some High School	High School Diploma/GED	Some College Credits	Associate Degree
Highest Level of Education:	6.8%	24.9%	29.2%	14.0%

	Bachelor's Degree	Master's or Prof. Degree	Doctorate
	16.1%	8.2%	.8%

Number Courses Previously Taken:

	None	1	2 - 3	4 or more
Noncredit:	54.0%	15.5%	18.6%	11.8%
Credit:	62.5%	5.7%	7.8%	23.9%

	Employed Full-Time	Employed Part-Time	Unemployed, Seeking Job	Unemployed, Not Seeking A Job
Current Employment Status:	59.3%	16.6%	5.7%	3.1%

	Not Employed Outside the Home	Retired	Other
	3.8%	6.0%	5.5%

n = 1,663 noncredit students; 27 community colleges
Due to rounding and missing data, percentages may not equal 100%.

An examination of the relationship of participant age and annual income (Figure 3) indicates that between 46% and 55% of responding noncredit students in each age category have an income that falls between $20,000 to $50,000 annually. At the older age levels, 41-50, and 51-60, the percentage of individuals with incomes of over $50,000 increases. Overall, the distribution of income across age levels is fairly similar.

Figure 3

RELATIONSHIP OF AGE AND INCOME OF ENROLLEES

Age	Annual Income		
	Less than $20,000	$20,000-$49,000	$50,000 and More
20 and under	29.0%	46.4%	24.6%
21-30	36.1%	50.2%	13.8%
31-40	24.6%	54.5%	21.0%
41-50	17.1%	47.1%	35.7%
51-60	16.2%	51.6%	32.3%
Over 60	22.3%	55.4%	22.3%

Using the three course categories, remedial, vocational, or community service, Figure 4 displays frequencies of each course category selected by males and females. To some extent the enrollment ratio reflects the makeup of the sample, more females than males. Females retain the higher frequency relationship in all categories but vocational courses is the category where the difference is greatest.

Figure 4

COURSE ENROLLMENT CATEGORY BY GENDER

Course Category	Male	Female
Remedial	44.0%	56.0%
Vocational	36.1%	63.9%
Community Service	40.4%	59.6%

Figure 5 presents frequencies of enrollment by selected age groups. Significantly more respondents enrolled in vocational courses overall and within each age category than other kinds of courses. Community service enrollment percentages are similar in each age group but younger students dominate remedial courses.

Figure 5

COURSE ENROLLMENT CATEGORY BY AGE

Age	Remedial	Vocational	Community Service	% of All Respondents
20-30	6.8%	20.4%	7.4%	34.6%
31-50	2.0%	39.5%	6.1%	47.6%
51 & older	.4%	11.5%	5.9%	17.8%
	9.2%	71.5%	19.4%	100.0%

Employed students were requested to identify the category that best described their employers. Figure 6 presents a summary of the responses. The majority, 53.2%, indicated they work for private business. Further specification of private business showed that of these, 26% were employed by a service employer, more than 12%

manufacturing, more than 6% retail, almost 5% finance, 3% utilization, and 2% in transportation. Labor organization employers accounted for 1.5%, professional or trade associations 11.6%, and not-for-profit organizations 10.4%. Local government agencies and/or state accounted for 22.6% of the respondents, including teachers or individuals associated with educational institutions.

Figure 6

EMPLOYERS OF NONCREDIT STUDENTS

Private Sector - 53.2%

Service	26.0%
Manufacturing	12.2%
Retail	6.1%
Finance	4.7%
Utilization	2.8%
Transportation	1.4%

Government Agency (local, state) - 22.6%
Professional Trade Association - 11.6%
Not-for-Profit Organization - 10.4%
Labor Organization - 1.5%

What motivates participation in noncredit courses?

Students were asked to identify their major reasons for enrolling in their current noncredit courses. The responses are summarized in Figure 7. The most frequent reason, given by almost one-third of the respondents, was self-enrichment or improvement. More than 22% indicated they were seeking to update job skills, and 19.5% as preparing for a job or a better job. Licensure or certification requirements were the reasons given by almost 10%, and increase of academic skills by more than 6%. In addition, 10% gave other reasons including a variety of

personal and job-related interests, self-growth, and in the case of driver education and related courses, to reduce insurance premiums.

Figure 7

MAJOR REASON FOR ENROLLMENT

Reason	Percentage
Self-enrichment/improvement	32.6%
Update job skills	22.1%
Prepare for better job	10.8%
Fulfill licensure/certification requirements	9.4%
Prepare for job	8.7%
Increase academic skills	6.3%
Other	10.0%

These data were also analyzed by gender and the chi-square statistic was used to test for significant differences in reasons for enrollment. None were found. The primary reasons for participation given by both males and females were self-enrichment/improvement or job preparation/upgrade.

Motivations were also examined by major enrollment category. The relationship of course category to enrollment motivation indicates, not surprisingly, that those enrolled in remedial courses most frequently identify their enrollment reason as an increase of academic skills (38.3%). Self-enrichment (15.4%) was the second most frequent choice. Of individuals enrolled in vocational courses, 32.3% indicate enrichment and/or job skill updating as their motivation. More students in

community service courses express their reasons as self-enrichment (42.5%).

Figure 8 presents frequencies of enrollment reasons by employment status. The data generally reflect the two most frequently given reasons for enrollment, self-enrichment/improvement and job preparation. Job preparation moves sharply to the most frequent reason for the unemployed group but self-enrichment/improvement ranks first for most groups, especially those retired and not employed outside the home. Licensure/certification as motivation ranges from 9%-14% of all groups except the unemployed/seeking a job and retired. Academic skills is valued considerably more by the unemployed than by full-time employed. Many of the "other" responses are linked to vocational interests. Also, as suggested by these comments, self-improvement apparently carries a vocational connotation for many employed respondents.

Figure 8

RELATIONSHIP OF EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND ENROLLMENT REASON

	Self-Enrichment/ Improvement	Job Preparation	Skill Update for Current Job	Licensure/ Certification	Increase Academic Skills	Other
Employed FT (n = 990)	31.9%	17.3%	11.8%	8.9%	2.4%	7.8%
Employed PT (n = 275)	26.7%	21.9%	14.5%	14.2%	12.0%	10.9%
Unemployed, seeking job (n = 94)	11.7%	53.1%	3.2%	5.3%	22.3%	4.3%
Unemployed, not seeking job(n = 50)	33.3%	21.5%	.0%	13.7%	9.8%	21.6%
Not employed outside home (n = 63)	50.8%	14.3%	.0%	11.1%	11.1%	12.7%
Retired (n = 99)	74.7%	2.0%	.0%	6.1%	3.0%	14.1%
Other (n = 92)	20.7%	24.0%	10.9%	10.9%	12.0%	21.7%

Does not = 100% due to missing data.

How do students assess noncredit courses?

To help determine the extent to which noncredit courses actually result in desired outcomes, participants were asked to rate the extent to which the course in which they were currently enrolled was meeting their expectations for the course. They were also asked about the quality of the course, general satisfaction, enrollment problems, and whether they would recommend the course to others. Figure 9 presents a summary of these responses.

More than three-quarters of all respondents indicated that their expectations were being met totally or mostly, and nearly 17% indicated that expectations were met fairly well. Only 6% indicated a serious shortcoming of the course in terms of meeting their expectations.

Similarly, students were asked if they would recommend the respective course to another individual. An overwhelming majority, 91.6%, indicated "yes" while 7% were not sure, and less than 2% responded negatively.

The quality of the course was overwhelmingly (93.5%) rated as good or very good, fair by 5%, and poor or very poor by 1.5%. Taken as a whole, these data show that participants are well satisfied with courses.

Respondents were also asked to indicate their satisfaction with noncredit courses in general. Almost 87% indicated that they were very/mostly satisfied with noncredit courses as a whole, another 10.5% somewhat satisfied, and less than 3% dissatisfied. These data are even more positive since nearly half of the respondents (46%) had previously taken noncredit courses (see Figure 2) and could be viewed as repeat consumers.

Figure 9

SUMMARY: STUDENT ASSESSMENT OF NONCREDIT COURSES

Course Meet Expectations:	Totally	Mostly	Fairly Well	A Little	Probably Not
	37.3%	40.2%	16.7%	4.8%	1.1%
Recommend Course to Others:	Yes	No	Not Sure		
	91.6%	1.7%	6.7%		
Quality of Course:	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
	63.0%	30.5%	5.0%	1.1%	.4%
Satisfaction With Non-Credit Courses Generally:	Very Satisfied	Mostly Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Not Satisfied	Not Satisfied
	43.1%	43.7%	10.5%	1.2%	1.3%
Enrollment Problems:	No	Yes			
	92.8%	7.2%			

Problems encountered:

- 2.1% Course scheduling
- 1.4% Registration procedures
- <1.0% Transportation, parking, payment procedures, child care, cost/tuition
- 2.2% Other (i.e., full classes)

n = 1,663 noncredit students, 27 community colleges
Percentages may not equal 100% due to multiple responses and rounding.

Further analyses involving selected variables resulted in the following findings:

- of those indicating that courses were meeting expectations totally/mostly, 96% indicated that they would recommend the course to another individual
- more than 89% of those totally satisfied rated course quality as very good
- 55% of those with an expectation rating of fairly well indicate the quality of the course as fair
- of those having unmet expectations, 11.8% rated the quality of the course as very good, 29.4% as good, and 23.5% as very poor.

The data also indicate that enrollment problems were rare. Of those 7% who did encounter problems, the most common were course scheduling and troublesome administrative procedures.

<u>What benefits/outcomes result from participation in noncredit courses?</u>

To further help determine the outcomes of noncredit courses, students were asked to identify tangible benefits that they expect to receive in their workplace setting from participation in noncredit courses. Figure 10 summarizes benefits by motivational category.

Figure 10

TANGIBLE BENEFITS IN WORKPLACE BY REASON FOR ENROLLMENT

	Tangible Benefits:			
Motivation:	Promotion	Salary Increase	Recognition	Total
Self-enrichment/ improvement (n=407)	2.7%	1.7%	18.4%	22.8%
Preparation for a job (n=107)	3.7%	16.8%	20.6%	41.1%
Preparation for better job (n=161)	17.4%	17.4%	21.1%	55.9%
Update skills for current job (n=341)	7.3%	12.6%	30.2%	50.1%
Fulfill licensure/ certification (n=147)	9.5%	10.2%	17.0%	36.7%
Increase academic skills (n=80)	1.3%	3.8%	17.5%	22.6%

As shown, almost 50% of respondents in the three categories expressing a vocationally related reason for enrollment anticipated some benefit in the workplace. Participants without job-related motivations were not expected to identify workplace benefits. However, almost 25% of those identifying self-enrichment and academic skill goals also identified tangible workplace benefits. These data strengthen the observation that self-enrichment and improvement reasons are also, for some, occupational improvement. One might expect nearly all respondents who are enrolled to fulfill licensure or certification to indicate a tangible benefit, but only 36.7% responded in that manner.

Benefit data were also examined by gender but no significant differences of benefits realized were found. Females tended to identify recognition slightly more often than males, and males indicated promotion/salary increases slightly more often than females. The frequency differences in both cases was only 4%.

Figure 11

RELATIONSHIP OF EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND BENEFITS

	Promotion/ Salary Increase	Recognition	None	Other
Employed FT (n = 889)	17.4%	22.3%	40.5%	19.7%
Employed PT (n = 232)	12.9%	21.6%	48.3%	17.2%
Unemployed, seeking job (n = 62)	9.7%	25.8%	30.6%	33.9%
Unemployed, not seeking job (n = 33)	12.2%	6.1%	10.7%	18.2%
Not employed outside home)(n = 28)	7.1%	10.7%	57.1%	25.0%
Retired (n = 52)	1.9%	13.5%	36.5%	48.1%
Other (n = 70)	11.4%	12.9%	37.1%	38.6%

(Does not equal 100% due to missing data.)

Benefits data were also examined by employment status. As shown in Figure 11, the responses of full-time and part-time employed respondents were similar except that more part-time employees expected no benefit. It is difficult to see how those who are unemployed expect to receive a promotion or salary increase but may view it as future potential. The large number of "other" responses are varied but include a fair number of expressions related to increasing self-worth or personal/social benefits.

What would be the impact of an increase in fees/tuition?

Respondents were asked to indicate the level of cost increase that would prevent their continued participation.

Figure 12

IMPACT OF COST INCREASE ON FUTURE PARTICIPATION

Increase Level	Frequency Per Increase Level	Cumulative Frequency
25%	43.3%	43.3%
50%	31.4%	74.7%
75%	4.8%	79.5%
100%	4.6%	84.1%
200%	2.5%	86.6%
Other	13.4%	100%

As shown in Figure 12, more than 43% indicated that a 25% increase would prohibit future participation. A 50% increase would prevent an additional 31.4% from enrolling. These data suggest that almost 75% of these participants would not enroll in noncredit courses if the cost increased by 50%. A 75% increase would prohibit about 80%, a 100% increase about 84% and a 200% increase more than 86%.

Of the 13.4% that discussed other increase levels, many comments were related to the tuition support provided by employers. If course expenses were covered by employers, individuals often did not feel in a position to answer. Others discussed the low cost of some programs, primarily courses/activities for seniors. Given that these fees were often a few dollars at some colleges, an increase was often viewed as

meaningless in terms of reaching a prohibitive level. On the other hand, some indicated that any cost increase, as low as 5-10%, would limit participation.

Examination of these data in connection with other variables resulted in finding that a majority of respondents who were very/mostly satisfied with noncredit courses identified an average prohibitive cost increase of 50%. The age level of noncredit enrollees apparently had no relationship to the level of prohibitive cost; at all age levels approximately 70% set the prohibitive increase cost level at 50%.

To determine what alternative might be taken by individuals should noncredit courses as known be no longer available, respondents were asked to indicate preferred alternatives. As indicated in Figure 13, more than 29% indicated they would enroll in a similar course at another public college, more than 24% in a similar course at a public high school/BOCES, but more than 22% would not seek a course. Less than 10% of the respondents indicated that they would purchase training or information from a commerical agency or correspondence school, 5% indicated they would enroll in a similar course at a private school/college and about 10% indicated other alternatives including use of libraries, purchase/use of books, and other self-initiated information or skill-attainment activities. Often additional comments dealt with the need to determine the kinds and purposes of courses plus consideration of the type of resources and alternatives available at the time. Usually the comments suggested that future decisions would depend on purposes and availability of resources rather than a clearly preferred alternative.

Figure 13

LIKELY ALTERNATIVES TO NONCREDIT COURSE IF UNAVAILABLE

29.3%	Enroll in similar course at another public college
24.1%	Enroll in similar course at public high school/BOCES
22.2%	Not take a course like this
8.4%	Purchase training/information from commercial agency/ correspondence school
5.0%	Enroll in similar course at private school/college
10.5%	Other

n = 1,663
Percentages may not equal 100% due to multiple responses and rounding.

What additional comments did noncredit students offer?

Many of the respondents (about 28%) took the opportunity of open-ended items to provide additional comments. Many responses had multiple messages, often including suggestions and complaints as well as comments about personal or social gain. A majority of the responses dealt with benefits and satisfaction. Suggestions and/or dissatisfactions appear in about one of every four comments. A similar number were specific to the concerns of programs for senior citizens. All comments were subjectively categorized and are summarized below in order of frequency. Illustrative comments comprise Appendix B.

Benefits and Satisfaction Comments

Satisfied, impressed, relevant, informative, practical, useful, helpful, excellent, good

Fulfills community need, benefits all, affordable, convenient, variety of offerings

Self-improvement, interpersonal contact opportunities, enjoyable, relaxing

Enhance job skills, update academic skills, reorientation to classes--necessary for success

Instructor quality, teaching effectiveness

Intentions to continue noncredit offerings

Suggestion Comments

Course content, structure, focus, class size, certificate

Inconvenient scheduling, location, condition of campus, facility, need for better directions, advertising, procedures generally

Need to have minimal fee, too costly, credit course option

Enrollment mandated, no comment

Negative reaction to questionnaire length/format/timing

Poor instructor, teacher

Dissatisfied, disappointed, nonbeneficial

Senior Programs

Improves quality of life, socialization, mental stimulation, lack of pressure, psychological incentive, challenges welcomed

Maintain and expand noncredit courses

Benefits and satisfaction comments outnumbered all others, particularly the dissatisfactions. Also, a number of respondents pointed out the utility of the information received and need for affordable convenient instruction that allows self-improvement and skills upgrade in a non-threatening (non-graded), relaxed setting.

Most frequent suggestion comments dealt with increasing the number and scope of courses. Some also indicated a strong preference for some kind of a certificate, credit equivalence designation or other proof of completion. Procedures such as advertising, scheduling, clearer directions and course location were also addressed by some respondents.

Almost all the comments regarding senior programs dealt with the need for and significant contribution of noncredit offerings to the quality of life for this segment of the population in the community.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The goal of this study was a statewide assessment of state-aidable noncredit remedial, vocational and community service course offerings by documenting program outcomes and effectiveness as perceived by the enrollees.

The time period of the study, 1989 spring semester, represented more than one-third of the estimated annual enrollment and number of noncredit courses offered. During the targeted semester, the majority of courses were categorized as vocational (72%) with most colleges also offering remedial and community service courses.

A majority of student respondents were female, both overall and within each major course category. While ages ranged from under 20 to over 60, about half of the respondents were between the ages of 21 and 40. Nearly three out of four respondents were employed full-time or part-time.

Four of the major reasons for enrollment, prepare for a job, prepare for a better job, update job skills, and fulfill licensure/certification requirements, combine to account for 51% of the responses. Self-enrichment/improvement was checked as the major enrollment reason by about one-third of the respondents. Students were well satisfied with the quality of their courses and nearly all would recommend them to others. Few enrollment problems or dissatisfactions were noted. Of those who are employed, a majority gained rewards from

noncredit course participation in the form of salary increase, promotion, recognition or other benefits.

Each category of courses, vocational, remedial and community service, but especially vocational courses, served more females than males. This may reflect the increase in numbers of women in or entering the workforce. Income levels of participants were more related to age than any other characteristic which leads to the observation that aidable noncredit courses serve a fair cross-section of the community in terms of economic status.

The data from the consumer-users clearly point to a conclusion that state-aidable noncredit courses are achieving their purposes for nearly all enrollees. Course participation directly contributes to employee skill development and/or self-enrichment and improvement. Senior citizens feel a personal benefit and a social benefit. Younger students improve their academic skills which will enable future success in credit programs. All people have a low-cost high-quality route to increasing job-related skills and enriching their daily lives.

While there were a few comments regarding a poor instructor or a disappointing class experience, the consumers praise their courses and ask for more as long as participation fees do not increase.

An increase of 50% in fees was determined as a prohibitive level by about three out of four respondents. However, because of some local minimal fees or employer-assumed tuition, some indicated that, because of these current arrangements, increases were not prohibitive. Alternatives to noncredit courses, if needed, would be selected depending on purpose and availability of resources.

Open-ended questions drew many comments of satisfaction and descriptions of personal benefits. Several suggestions were also made through comments and reactions to items, such as offer more courses at more convenient times. A number of respondents would like something tangible such as a certificate to be awarded at the end of the noncredit course to serve as proof of participation. Others commented that the college should continue to offer affordable education as it is a community service with end results that are beneficial to all of society not just participating individuals. Remedial courses were described as a bridge back into the teaching-learning situation, a way to enhance and update academic skills, and as a nonthreatening entry to future noncredit and credit work.

Data support the inescapable conclusion that aidable noncredit courses have found their market and are delivering a product that is satisfying and meeting the needs of the consumer.

Closing Statement

In general, noncredit state aidable courses have been shown to be achieving their purpose. The courses serve a wide variety of citizens and are meeting their expectations. The quality is high, to the point that most all respondents are willing to recommend their experience to others. The sense of fulfillment and perceived quality is pervasive across all types of courses, ranging from specific training for a required license to the broader psycho-social benefits enjoyed by older enrollees. Noncredit courses are beneficial in that they provide an affordable, easily accessible avenue for learning experiences that result, for many, in personal growth and achievement, for others an increase in vocational skills and occupational worth, and for some an

improvement in academic skills. While the consumers are very pleased with the product, many would cease to purchase it if the price increases substantially.

The current public policy and state support appears to be paying dividends to the participants, to their communities and to the state through growth of its human capital.

APPENDIX A
STUDENT SURVEY: SUNY COMMUNITY COLLEGE NON-CREDIT COURSES

Please check/respond as appropriate.

College: _____ Date: _____ _____

Title of course in which enrolled: _____ (1)

****

1a. Age range: ☐20 and under ☐21-30 ☐31-40 ☐41-50 ☐51-60 ☐over 60 (2)

b. Gender: ☐male ☐female (3)

c. Current marital status: ☐single ☐married ☐separated ☐divorced ☐widowed
☐other _____ (4)

d. Family income level: ☐under $10,000 ☐$10,000-$19,999 ☐$20,000-$29,999
☐$30,000-$39,999 ☐$40,000-$49,999 ☐$50,000 and over (5)

2. What is your current employment status:

☐employed full-time
☐employed part-time
☐unemployed, but seeking a job
☐unemployed, not seeking a job
☐not employed outside the home
☐retired
☐other _____
_____ (6)

3. What is your highest level of education at the present time?

☐Some high school ☐High school diploma/GED ☐Some college credits ☐Associate degree
☐Bachelor's degree ☐Master's or professional degree ☐Doctorate (7)

4a. What is your **major** reason for enrolling in this course?

☐for self-enrichment/improvement
☐to prepare for a job
☐to prepare for a better job
☐to update skills for my current job
☐to fulfill licensure/certification requirements
☐to increase academic skills
☐other _____
_____ (8)

b. If your answer to 4a. above is job-related, please check the category that best describes your employer

☐private business (finance)
☐private business (manufacturing)
☐private business (retail)
☐private business (service)
☐private business (transportation)
☐private business (utilization)
☐labor organization
☐professional/trade association
☐not-for-profit corporation
☐government agency (state or local) (9)

5a. At this time, do you think this course will meet your expectations?

☐totally ☐mostly ☐fairly well ☐a little ☐probably not (10)

b. At this time, would you recommend this course to others having a purpose similar to yours?

☐yes ☐no ☐not sure (11)

c. At this time, how would you rate the quality of instruction in this course?

☐very good ☐good ☐fair ☐poor ☐very poor (12)

d. Did you experience any problems in enrolling in this course? ☐yes ☐no (13)

If **yes**, check the items that best identify the difficulty encountered:

☐transportation
☐parking
☐registration procedures
☐course scheduling
☐payment procedures
☐child care
☐cost/tuition
☐other _____ (14-21)

PLEASE SEE REVERSE SIDE

6. If this course was not available, what alternative would you most likely take?

☐enroll in a similar course at a public high school/BOCES
☐enroll in a similar course at another public college
☐enroll in a similar course at a private school/college
☐not take a course like this
☐purchase desired training/information from a commercial agency or correspondence school
☐other _____ (22)

7a. How many non-credit courses have you previously taken here?

☐none ☐1 ☐2-3 ☐4 or more (23)

b. How satisfied have you been with non-credit courses in general?

☐very satisfied ☐mostly satisfied ☐somewhat satisfied ☐somewhat not satisfied ☐not satisfied (24)

c. How many courses **for credit** have you taken here?

☐none ☐1 ☐2-3 ☐4 or more (25)

8. As a result of taking this course, indicate the tangible benefits(s) for you at your place of employment or volunteer agency:

☐promotion ☐salary increase ☐recognition ☐none ☐other _____ (26)

9. Assume that the cost of non-credit courses increases. At what level increase would you **no longer** be willing to meet the cost and enroll?

☐25% increase ☐50% increase ☐75% increase ☐100% increase ☐200% increase
☐other, specify _____ (27)

10. Please add other comments or reactions regarding non-credit courses.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your assistance.

COORDINATOR SURVEY: SUNY COMMUNITY COLLEGE STATE-AIDABLE NON-CREDIT COURSES

Please check/respond as appropriate.

Name: _____ *College:* _____

1. Please list below all non-credit state-aidable courses currently being taught during this 1989 Spring semester. Check remedial (R), vocational (V), community service (C). Since no official SUNY designation is made, please use your best judgment. Also indicate length of time (i.e., 3 hours - 6 weeks) each is scheduled, student headcount and your best estimate of FTE in each course. Insofar as possible, please identify the firms and/or agencies that are served by each course (indicated by transcript requests, tuition payment, request for course, etc.) and the numbers served. Feel free to duplicate these pages as needed.

Non-Credit State-Aidable Courses

Title of Course(s)	R	V	C	Course Length	Student Headcount	Est. FTE	If known, Firm(s)/Agency(ies) Served	Employees Served
Sample: *Lotus I*		*X*		*3 hr - 10 weeks*	*20*	*1.3*	*Acme Business* *Burns, Inc.* *Mart Dept. Store*	*7* *2* *4*

Non-Credit State-Aidable Courses

Title of Course(s)	R	V	C	Course Length	Student Headcount	Est. FTE	If known, Firm(s)/Agency(ies) Served	Employees Served

2. Please provide headcount and FTE estimates for aidable non-credit courses as indicated.

Course Category	1988 Summer Semester			1988 Fall Semester (include Winter Session if appropriate)			1989 Spring Semester		
	Number of Courses	Total Student Headcount	Total Estimated FTE	Number of Courses	Total Student Headcount	Total Estimated FTE	Number of Courses	Total Student Headcount	Estimated Total FTE
Remedial									
Vocational									
Community Service									

Thank you for your cooperation.

Please return as soon as possible but no later than April 28, 1989 to:

Two-Year College Development Center
University at Albany
135 Western Avenue, Draper 306
Albany, New York 12222

APPENDIX B

Illustrative Noncredit Student Comments

-- Working full time, this satisfies my being able to receive instruction toward certification in alcoholism counseling without pressure of tests and grade average.

-- A non-credit course was a good chance to meet people with similar interests and problems and a good time of sharing and learning.

-- Quality of instructors available was, overall, remarkably high. This lends credence to the non-credit programs and entices one to seek out additional courses because of the manageable cost and high quality.

-- I took Developmental Math as a building stone to Math 101. I have never had this math and it probably would have been impossible for me to go on and obtain my associate degree in accounting if I did not take it.

-- I believe it is a wonderful way to grab some information quickly which will in turn grab your interest to elaborate and learn further information if one wishes to.

-- These courses are all fantastic looking and I wish that I could have afforded to take more. Please consider this plea from a student who is "eager to learn"!

-- Because of my income the way it is because some of the non-credit courses you offer I'm able to afford. Right at this time my income even with the disability I'm receiving which isn't much. Without the non-credit courses let say I can't keep up certain subjects. But with some of the non-credit courses to a certain degree it helps me to keep up some of the courses.

-- Non-credit courses are just as valuable to the community as credit-bearing. Extra training, even though not associated with a degree program, can assist in career building. In addition, many older returning students like to "sample the waters" and "get their feet wet" by exploring a non-credit course or two before committing to a full-fledged degree program. And it's a shame that "self-enrichment and improvement" can't be measured in dollars for the state, because that's one of the most important reasons of all for taking non-credit courses!!!!

-- In a rural area like this county where opportunities for "self-enrichment/improvement" are not that numerous, these courses which are open to everyone, represent a real service to the community. I believe that as PR for the college they are invaluable; also, because they get people from the county who would otherwise never see the campus, into the buildings and the library and the classrooms. You are building a group that will be supportive of the college and its activities.

-- This is my first non-credit course and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Our instructor was excellent and covered an extreme amount of information - but each moment was taught in an exciting manner. Definitely not boring.

-- Non-credit courses are more relaxing. I think you may learn more because you are not under pressure and you are not competing with others. I enjoy them over credit courses.

-- In the past I have taken non-credit courses which have been extremely helpful. Your teachers have been excellent! Thank you for these programs and I hope they continue. As a community learning institution you certainly try to meet the needs of the local people. That's quality!

-- In a time when college is too expensive for many lower income families to afford, I think these non-credit courses are necessary.

-- When course is advertised - a little course description with the ad.

-- This course has really brought up my self-confidence and helped me overcome math anxiety. My instructor makes it fun; I'm an A student in this--in high school was a D student.

-- This course was advertised in a well-designed brochure and questions I had concerning course content were courteously explained.

-- I believe that non-credit courses are a service that educational institutions are responsible for supplying to the communities of which they are a part. Without such offerings a basic need for education would be taken away from the people that may have a desire for training and education but not the time or need for competitive formal instruction.

-- I appreciate the opportunity to take courses for which I am not "under pressure." The atmosphere - both instructor and attendees - is more relaxed, the learning more appreciated, the information better presented. I hope the college will continue to provide this opportunity, especially to those who are intimidated by college credit or college level material. This provides an equal opportunity for everyone to learn and benefit.

-- Non-credit courses offered are super to enhancing job skills as the courses are geared towards needs of jobs in local area. Taking these courses is a boost to individuals self-confidence and capabilities. They also inspire one to enroll in regular college courses and/or other non-credit courses to further their education.

-- At present, as on occasion in the past, I feel this type of education is of inestimable value to the community, particularly in terms of self-help, self-improvement, etc.

-- Allows for one to expand their mental ability and achieve a feeling of self worth.

-- This course doesn't have a tangible benefit for my present place of employment but I am hoping to change careers as a result of this course and improve my lifestyle and our whole family will benefit.

-- The courses need more flexibility to take into consideration that everyone in the class don't start with the same preparation and objectives, e.g., if you already have a career occupation you need the option ot bring your job experience to allow you to tailor the courses to specifying job requirement and expectations.

-- I have taken many credit courses at varied colleges. I consider some to have been a waste of my time and money. The non-credit courses have proved to be more useful for my purpose of taking the course.

-- The classes and equipment/supplies are good in general but in the classes that are "male" oriented, I have experienced chauvinist attitudes from the instructors (i.e., small building construction) as if I wouldn't understand what the instructor is talking about or receiving incomplete or sarcastic responses to my questions.

-- In the early 1800's the demand for public education created an atmosphere that revolutionized this country. We now live in an area where that same revolution is advancing on a much higher plane. Without education we as a country cannot meet its demands. We live under a government that cannot function without knowledgeable participation. Education is not a luxury. It is a necessity just like health or military defense.

-- Many people work full time and cannot take advantage of credit college courses. I feel it is a necessity that non-credit courses are continued as they are more affordable and convenient for people interested in expanding their skills. Without them, many people who cannot afford to enroll in a degreed program would be left without any other way of bettering themselves.

-- Sometimes you are not sure what direction your life is taking. By taking this non-credit course it has given me some ideas and encouragement on what I can do for myself. It's always a good feeling when you learn something - even if you can't use it right away.

-- These courses are sought by people to enhance a skill for an individual according to each person's needs. If they are cancelled, I'm sure the upgrading in our education would suffer. Secretary's want to learn computers as an update to their education (for example). A cut back would not permit this to happen. This at a time when we all know the U.S. states it needs better education in the world. Instead it will fall back even further.

-- Non-credit courses for seniors are a stimuli to meet people, participate in worthwhile use of time, and learn many new and interesting things, thus slowly the aging process because of happy minds and bodies.

-- It's one of the few benefits of growing older. Thanks.

-- Non-credit courses are a benefit to retired people.

-- The course is enriched immeasurably by the high quality of instruction by a teacher who takes a strong personal interest in the advancement of each student's language skills, and who shares her love of the language with the class.

-- This course provides a community college - of amazing interests - and people - so that when you attend, physical illnesses take more than last place - you can then go home and feel you belong to a society in which you grew up in -- .

-- A mind - even an old one - is a terrible thing to waste!

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges OCT 20 1989